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CHAPTER II

Material Culture of the Santal.

The Village: The Santal villages with their houses on both sides of the street are situated on the plains. These villages are not well fortified. In each village only one unpaved avenue can be found, the width of which is about twenty five to thirty feet and the length is equal to the length of the village. There are tall trees at intervals on both sides of the avenue which make the path shady. In a big village generally twenty to thirty houses can be seen and in a small village there are only ten to twelve houses. In each village a Majhisthan is built, where Kulidrupe[1] (Panchayat) takes place and taxes are collected by the head-man of the village, and there the Manjhi Haram (head-man) worships the Pilchu Haram and Pilchu Burhi. In almost every village a Jahersthan can be found which is nothing but a cluster of Sal (Shorea robusta) trees where the Santals worship their village deities. The water supply of the village is derived from a streamlet which runs nearby. The Santal villages are very neat and clean and all the villagers take particular care to keep it so, and scavenging is done by the pigs and dogs which help in keeping the village neat. As soon as the houses have all been erected and the village established, some trees such as mango, jack-fruit etc. are planted; the Santals[2] have a belief that these trees bring prosperity. The Headman's house is generally built more or less in the centre of the village and close to the Majhisthan. The villages are generally known by their place names as Sunderpahari, Chandna, etc.

361 [363] 344 346 651 622 778 312 364 231 245 622 342 103

[1 Erratum: i.e., kulidrup. 2 Erratum: i.e., Santal. -- Analyst]

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361 787 The Santals observe certain omens before selecting the site for the village. Below are mentioned a few which are mainly based on what an old Santal guru known as 'Kolean guru' related to the late Rev. L. O. Skrefsurd about ninety years ago.

[825] About half a dozen Santals go inside a forest with a leader to select a site for their village. If they see any of three kinds of quails (a genus of gallinaceous birds to which the domestic fowl belongs) flying over there they say :

"Some day in the future a village founded here will be deserted".

[825] But if they see these birds hatching their eggs or if they come across a tiger on their way or see marks of its paws on the ground they say :

"Some day in the future a village founded here will thrive and become prosperous and we can stay here contentedly".

361 In selecting the site for the village, the Santals are very particular about the following things :—

The ground should not be damp and there should be enough good highland for fields and homestead. There should be enough land for cultivation and water should be readily available.

[344] [346] [778] In a Santal village two things are very important, one is the Mahajhisthan, the place made for the spirit of the original headman, and the other is the Jaherthan, the scared grove where the Santals worship the Bongas.

344 346 **The Majhisthan :** The Majhisthan or raised platform is an important place for the Santals. They build this place generally, in the centre of the village, near the

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Manjhi Haram's (headman) house. On it taxes are collected by the Manjhi Haram and legal disputes are settled. There is no fixed size for the Majhisthan. It is found that the Santals, in different villages make Majhisthans of different dimensions. In a village there was a Majhisthan ten feet long, eight feet broad and two and half feet in height while in another was one five feet long, four feet broad and one foot high. It consists of a raised mud mound over which a neatly thatched roof is constructed. The roof is supported by five upright wooden posts in the four corners of the Majhisthan and one in the centre. At the base of the centre post is stuck a small stone or wooden lump (sometimes shaped as a human head) daubed with vermilion. From the roof an earthen pot is suspended containing water brought from the Jahirsthan for the spirits to drink and beside it hangs a peacock's head. The floor of the Majhisthan is plastered with mud and cowdung.

The Jahirsthan (Sacred Grove): The Jahirsthan is a place where religious ceremonies of the village are performed by the Santals. It is situated at the end of the village and it must be within the boundary of the village. A cluster of sal trees about twenty to twenty-five in number is always required. Among these trees three are essential, and at the foot of each of these three trees a stone is put representing the deities, Jaherera, Turukomonrako, Marang-Buru. The fourth one is an Ashan tree which grows near these three sal trees and at the foot of this tree a stone representing the deity Pargana-bonga is kept. The fifth and the last one is a Mowa tree, which stands a little apart, and at the foot of this tree, a stone is placed to represent